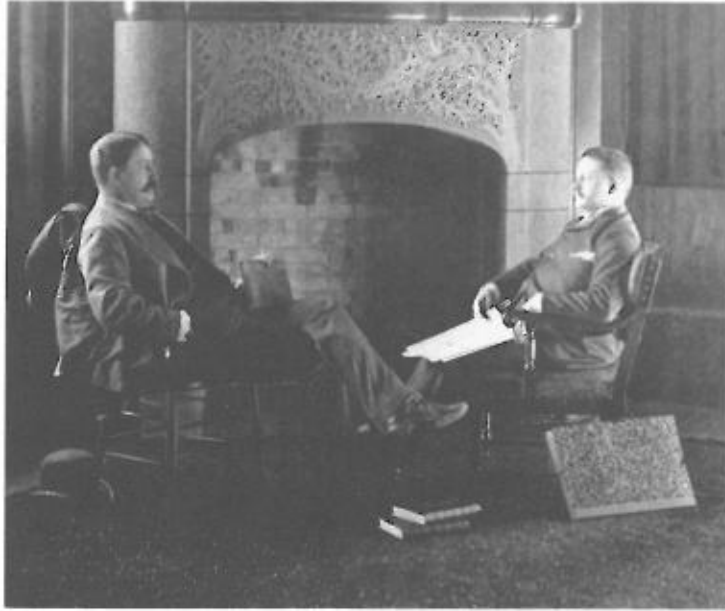
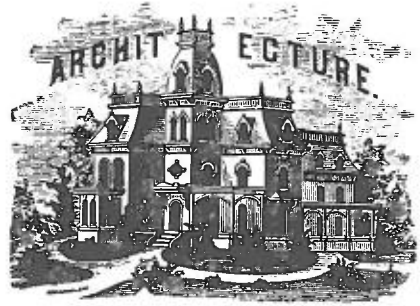


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Burnham and Root

As Chicago experienced its great building boom during the 1880s and 1890s, one of the major architectural firms whose designs shaped the city was Burnham and Root. During their eighteen years together, Daniel H. Burnham and John W. Root built some forty million dollars worth of buildings, including offices, churches, railroad stations, hotels, and residences.¹ In 1885-86 they designed their only Maine commission, a Bar Harbor residence for Mr. and Mrs. John Whittaker of St. Louis.²

The elder of the two partners, Daniel Burnham, was born in Henderson, New York, in 1846, and his family moved to Chicago in 1854. After failing the Harvard entrance exams, he was tutored privately in Massachusetts by Tilly Brown Hayward, who introduced him to architecture. With sufficient drawing skills, Burnham returned to Chicago and worked for the firm of Loring and Jenney. Still not settled on a career, he spent two years in Nevada as a silver speculator before securing a job with Carter, Drake and Wight, which was busy rebuilding Chicago after

the fire of 1871.³ Here Burnham met his future partner, John Root, who was head draftsman for the firm.

John Wellborn Root was born in Lumpkin, Georgia, in 1850, raised in Atlanta, and educated at the Clare Mount School in Liverpool, England. He returned to the United States in 1866 and began his studies at New York University, where he graduated with honors in 1869, receiving a degree in civil engineering. He worked briefly for James Renwick and then for John B. Snook.⁴ In 1872 Peter B. Wight asked Root to join him in Chicago as a foreman in the Carter, Drake and Wight firm. In 1873 Burnham and Root formed a partnership that would last until Root's premature death in 1891.

The firm's breakthrough commission of 1874 was a house for stockyard magnate John Sherman. Before the house was completed, Burnham was engaged to Sherman's daughter, Margaret.⁵ Social status quickly gave rise to new commissions for the young architects, and they were soon well respected professionally.

Most often it was Burnham who secured the commissions and Root who spearheaded the design.



Figure 1. Land Elevation of The Moorings, Bar Harbor, circa 1890 view
(Courtesy of the Bar Harbor Historical Society).



Figure 2. Ocean Elevation of The Moorings, Bar Harbor, circa 1890 view
(Courtesy of the Bar Harbor Historical Society).

However, Burnham was more than an office manager; he ignited Root's creative imagination and was particularly skilled at laying out the plan of a building. The collaboration was one that worked well. As commissions came their way, Burnham would often tell Root to delegate, but Root seemed determined to give attention to each project. Such must have been the case with the Whittaker Cottage, which was built concurrently with some of the firm's most involved projects. By December of 1885 work had begun on the Commerce Building, the Phoenix Building, and the Rookery, all in Chicago.

The Whittaker Cottage, known by its Bar Harbor appellation, "The Moorings", was built for John and Violet Whittaker of St. Louis, Missouri. Whittaker, a former bank director and head of the Francis Whittaker and Sons Packing Company, chose Burnham and Root with good reason. In 1880 the firm had designed the couple's St. Louis home.⁶

"The Moorings" was planned in 1885 and completed by the summer of 1886. Even with large and important commissions underway, Burnham visited the construction site in September of 1885.⁷ Entirely shingled on the exterior, the cottage featured a central two story bay of windows on the entrance facade with a one-and-a-half story engaged tower to the left (Figure 1). Extending around the south end and water side of the house was a wide veranda. The water side of this veranda was approached by a large staircase, above which was an open porch. The north corner was comprised of a three-story conical tower. Rising from the roof were two chimneys and an eyebrow dormer which faced the ocean (Figure 2).

In mass and scale, the Whittaker Cottage was similar to the firm's urban residential commissions of the period, but rather unusual as a Shingle Style essay. Unlike many shingled cottages which are rectangular and more sprawling, the Burnham and Root plan is solid and tightly massed. In many ways the Whittaker Cottage reflects the firm's designs for city plots with restricted space, much like the Ayer House of 1885-86 in Chicago. Yet the Whittaker Cottage is no less successful as a summer house because of its massing.

Burnham and Root must have thought well of the Whittaker Cottage, for they provided a virtually identical design for the home of Horace G. H. Tarr, a Montclair, New Jersey attorney. Built at 58 Highland Avenue in Montclair, the Tarr House was accorded a rendering and a description in the June 9, 1888, issue of the *Engineering and Building Record* of New York (Figure 3). Tarr was a personal friend of Root. His residence was demolished prior to World War I. The Whittaker Cottage met a similar fate.

Two other Burnham and Root shingled buildings shared characteristics with the Whittaker Cottage and the Tarr House. Although much larger, the Montezuma Hotel of 1884-85 near Las Vegas, Nevada, had a semi-engaged tower like the one on the Bar Harbor and Montclair residences. Also related in design was the shingled Lake View Presbyterian Church of 1887-88 in Chicago.⁸ Featuring a steep gabled roof, the church had an octagonal tower which became round and finally conical as it moved upward. Though not the usual material of choice for this firm better known for its skyscrapers, each of their shingled buildings was effective, distinctive, and rivaled those of the Shingle Style masters on the east coast.

Thomas C. Jester

NOTES

¹ Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, Chicago, 1974, p. 16.

² *Mt. Desert Herald*, March 19, 1886.

³ Hines, pp. 3-12.

⁴ Donald Hoffmann, *The Architecture of John Root*, Baltimore, 1973, pp. 1-5.

⁵ Hines, p. 19.

⁶ Hines, appendix of Burnham and Root's work includes the design for the Whittaker's St. Louis home of 1880.

⁷ *Mt. Desert Herald*, September 11, 1885.

⁸ Hoffman, p. 36, p. 116.



RESIDENCE OF H. AL. H. TARR, ESQ. MONTCLAIR, N. J.—BURNHAM & ROOT, ARCHITECTS.

Figure 3. Perspective View of the Horace Tarr House, Montclair, New Jersey, *Engineering and Building Record*, June 9, 1888 (MHPC).

**LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE
BY BURNHAM & ROOT**

"The Moorings", Mr. & Mrs. John Whittaker Cottage, Bar
Harbor, 1885-86, Destroyed.

Photograph of Daniel Burnham (L.) and John Root (R.)
Inland Architect & News Record, circa 1890

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